



Cruise Weekly today

CRUISE Weekly today features three pages of all the latest cruise industry news.

Live from Uniworld

UNIWORLD Boutique River Cruises has announced American actress Rachel Dratch as the celebrity host on its exclusive Women's Only Cruise (**CW** 25 Sep 2024).

Dratch, a former star on *Saturday Night Live*, will treat cruise guests to a special comedy set and Q&A on board *Catherine* while guests journey through the heart of France.

"Rachel is the perfect fit for what promises to be an unforgettable trip, and I'm looking forward to being onboard to host her and all of our guests on this sailing," Uniworld President & Chief Executive Officer Ellen Bettridge said.

Cruise grows in significance for FCTG

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) is aiming to double cruise sales, following strong results from the sector for the first half.

FCTG's results, announced yesterday, indicate an almost 25% first half growth to \$500 million in cruise & tour sales, which are indexed together.

The company delivered more than \$1 billion in TTV from cruise & tour sales in the first half, while accelerating its cruise market share was named as one of FCTG's five longer-term objectives through its specialist brands and retail portfolio.

FCTG's directors report suggested greater cruise sales in the second half of the year could see a heavier skew in profit, compared to the prior corresponding period.

TTV growth opportunities identified in FCTG's results presentation include sharper

execution of its 'Bundle + Save' strategy through its flagship Flight Centre brand.

This scheme, which typically yields a \$16,500 booking value, averages more than \$20,000 when cruises are included.

FCTG has been so bullish on cruise the past six months, it noted its flat underlying profit before tax result was largely due to investment geared toward fast tracking growth in the sector.

These investments collectively totalled almost \$4 million, relating to start-up costs for Cruiseabout, and the integration of Cruise Club UK into the business, which it purchased late last year (**CW** 30 Oct 2024).

Yesterday's results indicate FCTG paid £2.5 million (A\$4.8 million) for the Manchester-based company, which employs around 35 people, and turned over around £20 million in retail cruise

sales during the 2024 fiscal year.

These two new FCTG brands were both identified in the company's results presentation as "scalable", "winning" models.

Also relevant were costs associated with FCTG's agreement with Oceania Cruises for the 'Explorations by Norwegian' product, sold through the company's Ignite Travel brand (**CW** 03 Oct 2024).

FCTG noted sales for Explorations by Norwegian are promising, with about 1,500 staterooms already sold, although it will not recognise revenue on these cruises until they depart in 2026 and 2027.

The cash flow from investing activities was \$2.3 million, net of cash acquired.

FCTG also tabbed enhanced digital capability for cruise, enhancing its online bookings and product information. *MS*



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Royal short breaks

ROYAL Caribbean has released its latest combination of 2026-27 short getaways, which includes a lineup of two- to five-night vacations on 11 of its ships.

Beginning Apr 2026, travellers can opt for either *Utopia of the Seas*, *Wonder of the Seas*, *Harmony of the Seas*, or *Oasis of the Seas* across Port Canaveral, Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Mariner and *Explorer* will offer voyages across Florida and Texas, while short getaways are also available on *Liberty*, *Freedom*, *Vision*, *Rhapsody* and *Grandeur of the Seas*.

Cruisers can enjoy year-round short breaks on *Utopia of the Seas*, which will deliver a mix of three- and four-night adventures from Port Canaveral, visiting Royal Caribbean's private island, Perfect Day at CocoCay.

Meanwhile, new four- and five-night summer voyages are available from Tampa on *Rhapsody of the Seas*, which will explore the best of Cozumel and Costa Maya.

There are also winter breaks on offer, including four- and five-night Western Caribbean itineraries on board *Liberty of the Seas*, which will call into Royal Beach Club Cozumel when it opens in 2026.

The short getaways are available to book now, [HERE](#).

Dream & Star Cruises back

A NEW - or perhaps old - era is beginning at Resorts World Cruises, with the return of the dormant Dream Cruises and Star Cruises brands.

The two former Genting Group cruise lines both went bankrupt during the COVID-19 pandemic (**CW** 01 Mar 2022), but will now be revived in the coming months.

Resorts World's flagship *Resorts World One* will be renamed *Star Navigator*, sailing under the tweaked StarCruises brand.

Joining *Navigator* will be *Star Voyager*, the former P&O Cruises Australia's *Pacific Explorer* (**CW** 07 Jan).

Genting Dream, also sailing for Resorts World, will now once again cruise under the Dream brand, as its flagship.

The billionaire Chair of Genting Group, Lim Kok Thay, purchased *Genting* and *Explorer Dream* in a fire sale following Dream's bankruptcy, refloating the two ships just a few months later under the Resorts World brand (**CW** 19 May 2022).

The bankruptcy also saw Star's fleet of ships scrapped, however the cruise line's trademark was bought by Thay, for around US\$3.5 million.

The newly relaunched Dream will offer luxury fly-cruise itineraries, with *Genting* to be home ported in Singapore all year round, offering itineraries to Malaysia and Thailand.

Meanwhile, StarCruises will

operate short, port-intensive itineraries, targeting both domestic and fly-cruisers.

Navigator will begin four-night sailings from Singapore under her new name from 07 Mar, visiting Krabi and Penang, before being deployed to Taiwan for an exclusive eight-month season later in the month, connecting the country's scenic coastlines with various destinations in Japan and South Korea.

Voyager will set sail on 26 Mar, from multiple seasonal home ports in Singapore, Jakarta, Melaka, Bangkok, and Ho Chi Minh City, with more departure ports to be added.

Both cruise lines have long histories in Australia, with Dream completing an inaugural season of Sydney sailings prior to the pandemic (**CW** 28 Oct 2019), aboard *Explorer*.

The program, Dream's first international home port season, had proved so successful, a second local deployment was set to take place (**CW** 20 Feb 2020), before the pandemic put paid to those plans.

Dream's old *World Dream* ship is now sailing for Saudi Arabia-based Aroya Cruises as its flagship *Aroya* (**CW** 02 Jan 2024).

Disney Cruise Line purchased the unfinished *Global Dream* (**CW** 17 Nov 2022), which will begin sailing on non-stop cruises out of Singapore later this year (**CW** 15 Nov). *MS*

Literary line-up

SEABOURN has launched 'Authors at Sea', a new program available on select sailings between Mar and Dec 2025, featuring a line-up of literary luminaries.

Guests will be able to interact with best-selling authors, historians and biographers, while enjoying live events and hands-on workshops for aspiring writers.

The lineup for this year includes best-selling author Debbie Macomber, who has had six of her Christmas books adapted into movies on the Hallmark Channel.

Macomber will host a writing workshop for aspiring authors on the 20-day 'Pacific Passage: Golden Week to Glacier Bay' voyage on *Seabourn Quest*, departing 27 Apr.

On the eight-day 'Western Mediterranean Mosaic' itinerary departing May, guests can rub shoulders with Sandra Howard, who was a top international model in the 1960s and is now a novelist and freelance journalist.

Other guests include former FBI agent Robert Wittman; mystery crime writer Ann Cleeves; motivational speaker, Zelda La Grange; and Jeffrey Archer, a former athlete and politician, and the only author to have been a number one bestseller in fiction, short stories, and non-fiction.

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IMAGINE being hailed a hero by fellow passengers aboard a cruise ship for your valiant act...well, one passenger got to experience exactly this.

Freshly married Micah Lugones was on board *Carnival Valor* during a five-night Western Caribbean sailing with his wife Laci earlier this month, enjoying their honeymoon, which also happened to be their first-ever cruise, when Lugones was presented with a critical situation.

The couple were spending their day in-port in Progreso when Laci's hat was blown into the harbour.

But this wasn't just any hat - it was a memento from their wedding, and so Lugones made the split-second decision to dive in after it.

As he swam, onlookers cheered him on, watching from the pier and the balconies on the ship.

"When my wife's special wedding hat flew overboard at Progreso I knew I had to get it back," Lugones shared in a Facebook group made for guests of the voyage to connect.

"Got the hat and a story too! Thanks for everyone cheering me on, haha."

He was praised by fellow passengers in the comments section, with one saying, "you two are the sweetest...he is definitely a keeper!"

Celestyal shoots for the stars



CELESTYAL Cruises' first Arabian Gulf season has surpassed expectations, said Vice President for Business Development Janet Parton, underlining a record year for the line.

Speaking at a lunch with Celestyal partners in Sydney yesterday, Parton hailed the cruise line's new northern winter product, which has seen it cruise year-round for the first time (*CW* 02 Dec 2024).

Australia was key to Celestyal's success last year, with bookings up 37% from the market.

"Demand and interest for the product is so strong we extended our season adding 10% availability to our remaining season," she said.

"Our festive season and 2025 Desert Days cruises have sailed at full capacity and we smashed our estimated targets for the season.

"We are very grateful to our regional partners and the agent community for their support... our travel agent partners are critical to our growth plans in Australia, with the vast majority of our business coming via our

trade channels." *MS*

Pictured are Celestyal Business Development Manager Mary Williams; Ascend Travel Group Director Lynda Wallace; Celestyal Chief Commercial Officer Lee Haslett; Parton; and Ascend Director Julie Primmer.

Singapore bunkers

SINGAPORE has become the first Asian city to offer LNG bunkering for cruise ships via its HarbourFront Terminal.

The bunkering service is an extension of its existing LNG refuelling capabilities, which have been available for inner harbour and commercial vessels for nearly a decade.

Silversea's *Silver Nova* was the first ship to connect to the new LNG bunkering facility, which followed months of planning and compliance testing with port authorities.

"This successful operation will pave the way for other LNG-powered cruise vessels to bunker at our HarbourFront Terminal," said Singapore Cruise Centre Chief Executive, Jacqueline Tan.

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